Continuing Medical Education in Community Hospitals

HIS OWN CONTINUING EDUCATION is, and always has been, an important responsibility for every physician during a lifetime of practice. It is important for the inner satisfaction of a conscientious physician and it is no less important for the welfare of his patients. In recent years the rapid progress of medical science—a result of unprecedented public support for medical research—has focused not only professional but public attention upon the continuing education of practicing physicians. It has become necessary for this to become more visible and more measurable.

The medical profession has responded with programs at the national and state levels, and formal programs giving visible and measurable credit for time and effort in continuing medical education are growing rapidly. Accompanying this growth has been a decentralization of the authority to offer the essential Category I credit, first to medical schools, then to state medical associations and specialty societies which wish to become accredited. And now in California and the West this authority and responsibility is being further decentralized to community hospitals which can qualify for approval by the accredited state medical association.

This has the advantage of bringing approved programs of continuing medical education to the hospitals where physicians practice and where their educational needs can be more readily identified. But it also brings problems when the resources of a hospital and its medical staff are insufficient to conduct their own program without help from outside.

Elsewhere in this issue of the JOURNAL, Alvin Block describes experience with this problem in a community hospital and gives some helpful advice for others. But it is becoming increasingly clear that more attention should be given to linking the educational resources of the profession more closely to the educational needs of physicians in practice, and it is also increasingly clear that if this is to be done the necessary financial resources will have to be found.

—MSMW